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Choosing a College

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This is an article Scott has written to share with high school students when he meets with them to discuss postsecondary choices. Please share this with students.

If you are reading this, I am assuming you want to go to college. You must have a number of reasons why (to get a good job, be a teacher; play tennis, be a doctor, meet new people, choose a career, play in the band, etc.). Keep these reasons in mind as you begin to look at colleges. These reasons will tell you what to look for as you read about and visit colleges.

First, you should consider the things that you know you want from college. Does it have the academic programs you are interested in? Where is it located? What is the size of the student body? Are there extracurricular programs that you are interested in (sports, clubs, service organizations, etc.)? What are the costs?

Once you generate a list of colleges, there are more questions to ask. How are academic programs structured? What general support services (tutoring, orientation courses, writing labs, technological support, etc.) are offered? What does the campus look and feel like? How is the food? What kind of calendar or timeframe are classes taught in (quarters or semesters)? What is a typical class size for an introductory course? And finally, how are disability services organized?

It is important to know that there is a great deal of variability in how disability services are organized from college to college. Generally, students must take the initiative to receive services. College students have control over who knows about their disability and how to arrange accommodations; they will also have more responsibility for making those arrangements.

Another common fact is colleges will not ask you about your disability. You may choose to include information about your disability in your application. You can do this in an essay, in letters of recommendation, or in a separate letter included with your application. Different colleges have different ways of considering this information. Check with the disability services office or the admissions office about the procedures at the schools you are interested in.

WHAT ABOUT ADMISSION STANDARDS?

Once you identify several colleges you are interested in ask yourself "Could I be successful at these colleges?" Look at their admissions standards. Do you meet their minimum standards (required courses, GPA, SAT, etc.)? If the answer is no, there may be an alternative admissions process at the institution that you can ask about.

If you can picture yourself being successful at a certain college, the next question is how typical your profile is for the college. Are you below, right at, or above average for SAT and GPA? If you are at or above average, you are a good candidate. If you are below average, you may want to consider ways to strengthen your application. Consider your extracurricular activities, work experiences, hobbies,

etc. Another question to ask yourself is, "Are there places where the impact of your disability masks your true achievement or potential?"

DISCLOSING DISABILITY AT ADMISSIONS

Why disclose your disability? One reason is that your disability has influenced your approach to learning, your determination, and many other things in your life. What you have learned about yourself and how you have dealt with your disability may say volumes about the kind of person and student you are.

If you are below a minimum standard (or somewhere below average) requesting colleges to consider additional or alternative information is reasonable. The goal of this kind of request is to have the college consider a substitute measure or to take additional information into consideration.

If you wanted to request this kind of consideration, you should enclose a letter with your application that includes:

- A.** A statement that you have a disability;
- B.** Which admission requirement(s) you feel it affects and how;
- C.** What alternative or additional information you would like to have considered; and
- D.** Documentation of your disability by an appropriate professional.

Some colleges have a formal process for these kinds of requests while others do not. You should check with the disability services office about formal procedures. You may submit this kind of request even if there is not a formal process in place.

The next section is a list of typical admission measures and the underlying skills, ability, and knowledge they generally measure. This may or may not be how they are used by any particular college.

TYPICAL ADMISSIONS STANDARDS:

What Do They Measure?

1) FOUR UNITS OF ENGLISH

- a) Ability to produce a final written product (directly, utilizing adaptive technology, or utilizing alternative media)
- b) Ability to comprehend material in print or alternative media (tape, etc.)
- c) Basic familiarity with forms and styles of literature.

2) THREE UNITS OF MATHEMATICS (Geometry, Algebra I, Algebra II)

- a) Computational mathematics skills covering basic arithmetic through one variable algebra.
- b) Application of linear reasoning to a constrained set of facts.
- c) Symbolic manipulation.
- d) Ability to learn and apply an abstract system of complex rules.

3) THREE UNITS OF SCIENCE (including a laboratory science)

- a) Basic understanding of key elements in scientific method.

- b) Ability to make predictions based on a theory.
- c) Ability to make and test predictions based on collected observations.
- d) Ability to observe and describe the physical world.

4) TWO UNITS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE

- a) Familiarity and exposure to alternative cultural perspectives.
- b) Ability to learn and apply an abstract system of complex rules.
- c) Symbolic Manipulation.

5) THREE UNITS OF SOCIAL STUDIES

- a) Basic understanding of historical and social forces that have influenced current culture.
- b) Basic understanding of the relationship between society and the individual.

6) ONE UNIT OF FINE OR PRACTICAL ARTS

- a) Appreciation for and an understanding of the process of creating aesthetic or functional objects.
- b) Understanding of the relationship between design, function, and societal values.

7) TWO UNITS OF HEALTH & PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- a) Understanding of health and wellness issues as they relate to life style choices.
- b) Appreciation for the physical nature of oneself and the environment.

8) GRADE POINT AVERAGE

- a) Level of accumulated knowledge and skills acquired through high school.
- b) Predictor of the level of success in college.
- c) Indicator of motivation and consistency of performance across time and subject area.

9) RANK IN HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR CLASS

- a) Normative measure of academic potential.
- b) Indicator of relative academic competitiveness (motivation and ability) over time.

10) SAT- I /ACT

- a) Non-native predictor of ability to succeed in college.
- b) Measure of academic potential or aptitude.
- c) Measure of academic achievement.

DOCUMENTATION

To evaluate requests for accommodation or auxiliary aids a college will need documentation of the disability. Various colleges define what specific documentation is required differently. You should check on the requirements of the colleges you are interested in and discuss any updating of your

documentation that may be necessary when you are developing your Transition Plan. The guidelines below are likely to be acceptable by most institutions.

GENERIC DOCUMENTATION GUIDELINES

Documentation should include the following six elements:

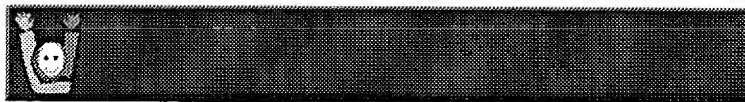
- 1) Diagnostic statement by an appropriate professional identifying the disability, date of most current diagnostic evaluation, and date of the original diagnosis,.
- 2) Description of the diagnostic tests, methods, and/or criteria, used.
- 3) Description of the current functional impact of the disability including specific test results and examiner's narrative interpretation.
- 4) Treatments, medications, or assistive devices/ services currently prescribed or in use.
- 5) Description of expected progression or stability of the impact of the disability over time, particularly the next five years.
- 6) Credentials of the diagnosing professionals.

Beyond the six elements needed for documentation, recommendations that state how you benefit from accommodations, adaptive devices, assistive services, compensatory strategies, and/or collateral support services are valuable.

The PostSecondary LD Report is a newsletter for guidance counselors, students with learning disabilities, parents and teachers featuring current information for making the right postsecondary choices. It is published four times a year by Block Educational Consulting, 4218 Olentangy Blvd., Columbus, OH 43214. Ph. (614) 263-0938

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